

SORCERER

The Apprentice Version

By Ron Edwards

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There you can order the full Adobe Acrobat version of the game. It includes great art, a wider range of character creation options, a hefty section on preparing good stories for Sorcerer, lots more examples, and a whole section on demon creation you can't get anywhere else.

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Introduction

In this roleplaying game, each player creates and runs a powerful sorcerer in the modern-day world. Each character (PC) comes equipped with at least one demon he or she has bound and at any time may try to summon and bind more demons. The demons have tremendous superhuman abilities; the sorcerers themselves have no special abilities or powers beyond their knowledge of how to summon, command, and bind them. The Game Master (GM) plays the demons as characters.

The sorcerer is not like magic-using characters in most roleplaying games. They are not wizards who channel the harmonious elements of the natural world. They do not “cast spells.” They know that the traditions, cultures, rituals, and bodies of knowledge surrounding what we call magic or the occult are wrong. It is hogwash, flimflam, swindlery, and lies. Instead, they break the rules of reality to summon and command beings that are Not Supposed to Be Here. They are outlaws -- the ultimate in arrogance.

Sorcerous magic is powerful, very obviously Not Natural, and has no true masters. Demons shriek with malicious delight or lick their brutish lips in anticipation as they materialize from Outside and match their power against the sorcerer's wits. Sorcerous deeds mix the heady possibility of awesome power and the certainty of blood-freezing danger. If you risk all on a crucial bargain with a demon, get nervous when it readily agrees . . . what have you missed?

The rules do not include a premise for what sorcery "really is," that is left to the Game Master for every group. You, the GM, must decide what *demon* means to *you*: a blasphemous threat to one's soul? A misunderstood rebel? A psycho-killing menace? In fact, it's totally up to you whether there is any religious content to the definition at all. Whatever definition you settle on, don't let players railroad the story with their own assumptions. Remember that a sorcerer might think that demons come from Hell, or from Dimension X, but only the GM knows for sure.

Roleplaying is a lot like playing in a band: on game night, you get together and make cool-sounding noises. You'll have to try people out and have standards for their abilities. Everyone has to listen, everyone has to play honestly and hard, and no other group will be quite like it. It doesn't concern winning, although showing off for your friends might be part of it. It has nothing to do with losing either, although screwing up or regretting things can

play its role. In a band, if someone's not having fun, they stop coming. If someone is not up to the level of the other members, or can't handle their end of things, they stop getting invited. Eventually the band might be pretty good. When all is said, the rules you hold are just some instruments. The music is up to you.

System rules

Sorcerer is a dice-based RPG. It does not matter what sort of dice your roleplaying group uses, as long as they (the dice) all have the same number of sides. Characters' scores and momentary modifiers are all measured in dice, so that one might be said to have four dice of Will, or a two-dice bonus in an attempt to bind a demon, or whatever. Every character has several scores, including Stamina, Will, Lore, and Cover (described fully in Character Creation below).

Roll whenever:

- two characters are trying to accomplish the same thing,
- one character is trying to do something while the other tries to prevent it, and
- one character is attempting a difficult act.

Rolls are always made against someone else's roll or a set number of dice rolled by the Game Master to reflect how difficult the task is.

Do not count the actual total value rolled. You are not aiming for a target value. Instead, simply match the highest single value rolled by each party and see whose is highest. This is the Basic roll in Sorcerer; there is no other.

Example: Fred rolls 4 dice and Fritz rolls 6 dice, using 10-siders. Fred's highest value on a single die is a 10; Fritz's highest is an 8. Fred won (was successful).

If the two highest dice are tied, simply go to the next highest pair and compare them, until one party wins. If absolutely every pair is tied, either resolve the conflict in some even way or roll again.

To see how well one succeeded or failed, count the winner's number of Victories: the dice that show higher values than the highest of the loser's dice. This is especially important when interacting with demons and during combat (which are sometimes the same thing).

Example: Fred, above, actually rolled 10, 4, 4, 1, whereas Fritz rolled 8, 8, 6, 5, 2, 2. Fred was still successful, but only gained one victory (the 10 over the 8). His advantage over Fritz is minimal, whereas four (total) victories would indicate total domination. If they were racing, he would have won only by a hair. If he had been trying to hit Fritz, he would have inflicted only minor damage.

If you're a player, it's easy. Just call out the highest value from the dice you rolled, and if the GM frowns and says, "Next," call out the next highest. If you're the GM, however, reading rolls fast is the necessary skill. The first step is determining who won: whoever got the highest value. Then ask, "How many victories?" Look at the loser's highest value, then count the winner's dice that exceed that value. If the number of victories is equal to the winner's number dice, then that's called Total Victory.

- Fred rolls 10, 8, 8, 4, 3; Fritz rolls 2, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1. Fred won with five victories, and in this case it was Total Victory, which ought to merit some kind of special advantage.
- Or Fred rolls 8, 5, 5, 2; and Fritz rolls 8, 7, 6, 1. In this case, Fritz wins with two victories: the first two 8's cancel out, then the 7 and 6 are higher than Fred's other dice.
- Or, finally, Fred rolls 9, 7, 2, 2; and Fritz rolls 10, 10, 1, to win with two victories.

The key to success in Sorcerer isn't hard to figure out: pile on the dice. Equal numbers of dice give a 50% chance of success, and a difference of two or

more dice is a definite advantage. So how do you get more dice? This is where roleplaying comes in.

- A dramatic or appropriate quip while announcing the task: +1 die
- Announcing a task generically ("I swing at him!"): -1 die
- Repeating a simple task after failing: -1 die (cumulative)
- Especially clever version of the action: +2 dice
- Especially stupid move: -2 dice
- The announced action moves the plot along significantly: +2 dice
- Obstructive, petty announced action: -2 dice

All the items above are cumulative, making the dice in Sorcerer very flexible. If you have a Will score of 4, that means you get 4 dice to roll for Will-based things, but often that just won't be enough. In a dice-rolling situation, the players should not shift out of roleplaying mode but rather get as into it as possible, because that way they can pack their rolls with extra dice.

The actions taken by player-characters in Sorcerer fall into three types: sorcery, combat, and everything else. The mechanics of all three are exactly the same and use the dice system described above. For sorcery, it's a matter of matching Will or Lore against some score of the demon (use the chart in the Sorcery section). For combat, it's usually Stamina vs. Stamina, modified heavily by circumstances, and damage is figured from the victories of the winner (use the chart in the Combat section). For everything else, every character may perform physical tasks using Stamina, mental or emotional tasks using Will, sorcerous tasks using Lore, and any professional/personal tasks using Cover (use the chart in the Resolving Actions section).

Creating your sorcerer

You must follow all these steps to make up a sorcerer character. For this version of the rules, you pick options from lists; in the full version, the lists are longer or the options are left to your imagination.

Pick score values for Stamina, Will, Lore, and Humanity. These indicate how many dice you roll during play. If you have Stamina 4, roll 4 dice when using it (subject to modifiers of course). Choose from the following list:

- Stamina 2, Will 6, Lore 2
- Stamina 4, Will 4, Lore 2
- Stamina 5, Will 3, Lore 2

Now set your character's starting Humanity to equal either Stamina or Lore, whichever is higher.

Pick a list of Descriptions for your scores. These specify how your character has developed them. One character might have Stamina 4 because he works out and jogs; another might have Stamina 4 because he doses up on steroids and amphetamines.

Stamina. Choose from the following:

- Scrapper: you have a violent background and know how to stick a thumb in someone's eye.
- Clean liver: you take care of your health and are physically fit.
- Drugs: you dose up on performance enhancing substances with little regard to your health.

Will. Choose from the following:

- Belief system: totally religious, totally rationalist, whatever -- you are sure you know how the universe works.
- Zest for life: if it ain't fun, it ain't worth doing.
- Rage/vengeance: someone is going to pay for what has happened to you.

Lore. all characters made using this version of the rules have the same description for Lore.

- Apprentice. This means you've learned sorcery from another person whom you owe some sort of obligation. Choose a basic sorcerous background for this relationship:
 - The Way of the Black Wheel: death, sacrifice, damnation
 - The Cult of the Dark Lady: ecstasy, manipulation, abandonment
 - Sanzoku: combat, honor, and more combat

- Drug-based: mystic insights and fried brain cells

These backgrounds are treated in some detail in the Branches of Sorcery section.

Pick a Cover, which is basically what everyone thinks your character does for a living, from the following list. Your Cover serves as a "skill list" during play; you are considered competent at all the tasks it calls for. Its value is set equal to Will (or Stamina where marked with an asterisk).

- ambitious politician, late 30s
- artsy musician, middle 20s
- police detective, late 30s
- college student, late teens
- hard-partyin' biker, middle 20s *
- university professor, from 30 to middle 60s
- corporate executive, early 30s
- model, early 20s *
- ex-con, early 30s
- drifter/street person, middle 40s
- hit man for the Mob, early 50s

Pick a demon. Take a look at the demons described in the final chapter. Pick one you like! This is your starting demon, and you may freely describe how you came to meet and Bind it. See the Branches of Sorcery section for more details about each.

- Regin: a golden eye that freezes people in their tracks
- Strase: a tattoo that can detach itself and reform into an imp
- Skavos: a ceremonial dagger
- Wahoo: a hot-lookin' babe who can turn into a horrifying huge floating eyeball
- Yahoo: a possessor demon who likes to fight
- Scatch: another possessor who switches bodies through sexual contact
- Spike: a very useful fighting knife
- Bzzt: a very useful chain whip
- Bump: a very useful claymore (scottish sword)
- Woot: a bottle with decidedly unnatural contents
- Ranth: a demon who lives in your unconscious
- Rogg: a slithering shadow

Pick a Need for your demon from the following list, or make up a Need instead, subject to the GM's approval.

- blood from Binder
- listen to music
- occasional animal (house-pet size) for dinner
- affection and compliments
- sing loudly
- scratch weird runic markings into things
- make bets
- gossip
- get ears (or equivalent) scratched

A demon should get a dose of its Need about once a week, more if you call on its powers often or in ways it doesn't like. The GM will determine what it thinks of your mastery and roleplay it accordingly.

Bind your demon. Choose which Attribute (Stamina, Will, or Lore, never Humanity or Cover) you will use to Bind your demon. The player rolls that many dice, and the GM rolls dice equal to the demon's Power. The demon is Bound, no matter what, but only the GM knows and records who won the roll, and by how much. See the Sorcery section for more about Binding.

You must also roll the demon's Power against the character's Humanity. If the character loses, he or she loses a point of Humanity.

Pick your Price. Sorcery doesn't come cheap. Your character has a personality quirk, an injury, or any other quality that reduces his or her effectiveness in certain situations. In game terms, this is a *1-die penalty* to any and all dice rolls under the defined circumstances. It might have come about because of your early experiences with sorcery, or it might have been a quality that led to sorcery in the first place. Either definition is acceptable, but your character has paid a price, and it shows. Choose from the following list.

- Arrogant. You get right up people's noses. Penalty applies to all status-oriented situations.
- Gets no respect. Demons can't take you seriously. Penalty applies to all commands to demons.
- Paranoid. Twitchy, jumps a foot at slightest provocation. Penalty applies whenever you are NOT under direct physical attack. (This is not a flaw that goes well with the more suave Covers.)
- Substance abuse. Say no more and pick your poison. Penalty applies when you haven't had your fix recently, as well as when you've just had one.

- Injury. A demon or cruel master gimped you, or maybe your congenital handicap is part of your motivation. Penalty applies when you're running or otherwise being athletic.
- Goofball. You're just a social loser. Penalty applies when you try to convince anyone of anything.
- Sexual coward. Lots of good story potential here with those Dark Lady demons, eh? Penalty applies in all romantic situations.

Humanity. Your initial Humanity score is set equal to the higher of either Stamina or Will. You might have dropped a point already from Binding your demon, or you might not. Humanity is used like any other score during play (see Detailed Rules below), but it also indicates how 'round the bend you are as a human being. Losing Humanity makes the person shaky, twitchy, haunted-looking, or cold toward others.

Humanity is lost by performing certain sorcerous acts (see the Sorcery section) or by doing things that, in the GM's opinion, are ethically unpardonable. You will roll your current value against (1) a demon's Power or (2) itself; if you lose, you'll drop a point. If your Humanity hits zero, the following fun things happen:

- the character is certifiably insane and possibly possessed by a demon
- the character is now run by the GM
- serious therapy or perhaps an exorcism is required for recovering Humanity to 1

Before this crucial point, a character may increase Humanity at the GM's discretion by performing praiseworthy acts. The roll is the same: Humanity against itself.

Humanity is the basis for character improvement: at the end of a Sorcerer story, the player may roll Stamina, Will, and Lore against current Humanity. Success means the score is raised by a point. (Note that after initial character creation Humanity is no longer linked to a given score).

More broadly, Humanity is the center of all Sorcerer stories, which in the end are about only one thing: how do you achieve something with methods that are (or very easily could be) evil? Do you succeed? Is the price you pay too high? Playtesting has produced the full range of outcomes to these questions. To the mature roleplayer, this is a lot more satisfying than many

video-game style RPGs, in which the characters merely live or die, but in practice, they simply keep living so that the game will continue.

Example character: Bobby Scurlock

I start with the idea of a young guy who doesn't take a whole lot of crap from anyone.

Attributes: Stamina 2 (scrapper), Will 6 (zest for life), Lore 2 (apprentice). This works well for a person whose mouth is bigger than his britches. On the other hand, it's enthusiasm rather than rage that gets him in trouble. He can fight, but not especially well. As for his apprenticeship, I'll put him in the Way of the Black Wheel, a dangerous and intense branch of sorcery. *Cover 4 (college student, late teens):* this is closest to what I have in mind and I privately resolve to get him kicked out of school pretty soon. The Goth thing's been done to death, so Bobby is not tormented or alienated, just exuberant..

Price -1 with romance (sexual coward): oh-ho! Now I'm getting somewhere; perhaps what this guy needs is a murder mystery with a beautiful suspect.

Humanity 6: initially set equal to Will, which is higher in this case than Stamina. This score isn't done yet, though; we'll return to it after we define his starting demon.

Regin seems like a good choice. I further decide upon "listen to music" as his Need; since Regin sits inside Bobby's own eye-socket, that means Bobby has to do so as well.

Time to do some sorcery. Bobby will use his powerful Will for Binding (it takes some serious willpower to remove your own eye!), so that's 6 dice against Regin's Will of 5. He rolls 8, 7, 3, 3, 2, and Regin rolls 5, 4, 2, 2, 2. Bobby wins with 2 victories (note: the GM keeps this Binding Strength secret from the player). From now on, in any roll that opposes Bobby against Yahoo, the sorcerer will get a two-dice bonus. The only exception is checking Humanity loss.

Speaking of which . . . Bobby rolls his Humanity (6) against the demon's Power, which is also 6. He gets 9, 9, 7, 6, 5, 1, against -- uh oh! -- 10, 5, 3, 3, 2, 1. He loses. His Humanity is reduced to 5.

In the full version of Sorcerer, players have a lot more latitude with beginning characters. They don't have to start as apprentices, for example, and

the starting demons can be built from the ground up rather than being chosen from a list.

Finally, the Kicker. Sorcerers are intense people and any story they star in will have to be interesting. Every character needs to be facing a problem, a threat to one or more of the following:

- life or health
- his or her stuff
- status
- loved ones

You should also consider the character's sorcerer mentor and the act or acts that are owed to him or her.

Example: Bobby is getting stalked by a mysterious woman who keeps messing with his love life. At first it seems like his imagination, but she keeps showing up right when she shouldn't. What really makes him nervous is that Regin can't see her: that is, when he looks at her using his demon eye, she's not there.

In a character-driven (as opposed to setting-driven) roleplaying game like Sorcerer, the hero must be barrelling toward an ending: live or die, win or lose, succeed or fail. There's no point to playing unless even before you start, your character is desperately fighting and scheming for something.

Detailed rules

So what can you do? Here comes the attacking demon, or here's the crime boss you need to convince, or what does this passage in the this forbidden tome mean, anyway? You look at the sheet and -- gasp! -- there is no skill list! All you see are a Cover, a Flaw, and Descriptions for each of the Scores.

In fact, this makes roleplaying easier, not harder. Here's how it works:

- Someone is competing with you or opposing your action: Roll your relevant score against theirs.

- You must overcome wounds or some aspect of yourself: Roll your relevant score against the other relevant score, or against the value of the damage.
- You are trying something difficult: Roll your relevant score against dice chosen and rolled by the GM. Use the following table for the "difficulty" dice.

NUMBER OF OPPOSITION DICE	REPRESENTATIVE CIRCUMSTANCES
0	Typical task for this character; he or she does it without any roll needed (even if it's highly skilled!)
1	Mildly annoying or distracting: someone is talking to the PC, he or she is driving, etc.
Greater than 1, less than PC's score	The task is trickier than usual, or someone is trying to divert the PC's attention for some reason, or loud music is right in his or her ear
Equal to the PC's score	The task is unusually hard given the PC's background, like trying to start a car with a shorted-out ignition, or someone is trying to hit you while you attempt the task.
Greater than the PC's score	Getting the task done requires serious luck; someone is beating the PC with a dead cat, or he or she is hanging from a catwalk by the legs while attempting the task
0	Flatly impossible for this character; the GM informs the player that the PC fails without any roll needed

Of course, all the roleplaying-oriented bonuses and penalties described in Chapter One apply in full as well. Also, penalties for the PC's Price and injuries (see Damage below) apply to interaction and physical task rolls as well as those for combat.

The especially-cool thing about this system is that you can use your full dice for things that you only just now realized are consistent with your character concept. There's no need to scan the pages-long skill list wondering what will be useful in the future.

Example: Bobby has a lot to cope with as he deals with his Kicker. Recall that his Cover is "college student," which applies to any and all skills for that activity.

- He's taking a test in class as the mysterious woman stares at him: Cover vs. the difficulty of the test, under pressure.
- He attempts to convince a student employee at the Registrar to track her name through the school records: Cover vs. the employee's Will.
- He gets chased by a mysterious pair of assailants: Stamina vs. their Stamina.
- He fast-talks his way into the hotel apartment where the mysterious woman lives: Will vs. the clerk's Cover.
- He tries not to puke at what he finds in her apartment bedroom: Will vs. his own Humanity.
- He tries to understand the strange rune written on the bathroom mirror with soap: Lore vs. the Power of the demon it represents.
- He may perceive that his pursuers are creeping toward him from the outer room: Will vs. difficulty set by the GM.
- He struggles to open the locked door that traps him: Stamina vs. difficulty set by the GM.
- He faces down his attackers: Will vs. Will.

Sorcery

All PCs in Sorcerer can do all the rituals listed on the Sorcery Chart, at any time during play. They are: **CONTACTING, SUMMONING, BINDING, PUNISHING, BANISHING, and CONTAINING.**

THE SORCERY CHART

RITUAL	THE SORCERER'S	VS. THE DEMON'S	MODIFIERS
Contact	Lore	Power	Sequence of tries; drugs
Summon	Will - Humanity	Power	Sequence of tries; sacrifice
Bind	Appropriate Score	Will	Desire and Need
Punish	Will	Stamina	Nothing special
Banish	Will + Humanity	Power + Will	Nothing special
Contain	Lore	Power	Preparation

Demons cannot perform sorcery. The rituals on the Chart are not available to them as stated tasks under any circumstances.

All of the listed rituals take anywhere from half an hour to three hours to perform correctly. A PC may attempt to speed things up, like Banishing a demon right there in combat, for example, but the relevant score is reduced to 1. Also, a PC may choose to take from six to 24 hours to perform a ritual, being very careful in all its details, in which case he or she gains a 1-die bonus to the roll.

Contacting a demon requires expanding one's mind well out of commonly-acknowledged boundaries. The sorcerer's Lore measures how far the perceptions can be pushed before becoming jumbled; thus it is matched against the demon's Power, which measures how far you must stretch your mind to perceive (or conceive of) that demon.

Bonus dice for Contacting are awarded for massive doses of hallucinogens, especially those refined by the sorcerer for this use. For every

hit dropped, award the sorcerer one die as a bonus. However, there is a cost to this sort of activity: at the end of the Contact attempt, successful or not, the sorcerer must roll his or her Will vs. dice equal to the number of hits dropped. Failure means that his or her Will is impaired by one for several weeks; total failure (no victories) means the loss is permanent!

One can continue to attempt a Contact even after a failed roll, with a penalty of 1 die to Lore and Stamina both per extra attempt. If the cumulative penalties bring Lore to zero, the sorcerer is catatonic for several hours; if they bring Stamina to zero, he or she faints, again for several hours. The clever player might raise the character's Lore with hallucinogens and Stamina with stimulants . . . the clever GM will certainly allow this but will also make the most of various physical and social problems that might arise thereby.

Once Contacted, a demon can be perceived and spoken to; any kind of information can be exchanged. However, neither sorcerer nor demon may affect the other physically or in terms of Binding unless the demon is Summoned. The communication stays open, so to speak, for one hour per victory of the Contact roll, unless the sorcerer terminates the Contact or makes another Contact roll to prolong it.

Summoning a demon may only be attempted if it has been Contacted, whether by the summoner or by someone else. All demons want to be Summoned and will not resist; the only thing that the sorcerer must overcome with his or her Will (as modified by Humanity) is the demon's intrinsic Power. The same penalties to Stamina incurred by repeated attempts to Contact also apply to Summon. A summoned demon is not automatically bound, which is why the wise sorcerer prepares a Contain before trying.

One method for improving the chances to Summon is a sacrifice: killing a living thing during the ritual. The victim's Stamina is used as a one-time bonus to the roll. The social disadvantages of making this practice a habit should be clear; furthermore, performing a sacrifice entails making an additional Humanity check. If it is a human sacrifice, this check has a penalty equal to the victim's Humanity instead of the usual -1.

Banishing a demon is much like Summoning, although the demon will almost certainly resist with its Will and the sorcerer uses his or her Humanity as a bonus. If the demon is bound, the strength of the binding (regardless of whose favor it supports) is used as a penalty. A banished demon must be re-Contacted and re-Summoned in order to trouble anyone, ever again.

Combat

Binding a demon is the most important act of sorcery. One may have contacted and summoned a demon to Bind it, or one may merely encounter it in reality. The means of Binding can vary from person to person, which is why "appropriate score" is used instead of some specific skill. You can challenge it, promise it something, or even seduce it, whatever is appropriate to the demon's Need and your personality.

Binding an un-Bound demon always works! Either the demon or the sorcerer will have the success for the roll, and the total number of that individual's victories is the Binding Strength. It will be used as a bonus for all their interactions thereafter. A Bound demon cannot be re-Bound unless it is freed from the first contract. There is no upper limit to how many demons a sorcerer may Bind, but a demon can only be Bound to one sorcerer at a time.

Punishing a demon removes its Power in dice equal to the sorcerer's victories. The penalty applies to all the demon's abilities; the dice are regained with Stamina rolls vs. the strength of the Punish. This hurts the demon a lot and they really hate to be punished. You can punish your own Bound demon automatically, removing Power equal to or less than your Will, down to Power 1. Punishing someone else's Bound demon uses the strength of the Binding as a penalty.

Containing a demon means limiting its movement, whether to a certain vicinity or relative to another person or object. A Contained demon is also immune to Banishment as a consequence of Need or lack of a host or master (although it can be formally Banished by a sorcerer). The sorcerer must prepare the focus for the Containment, such as a pentagram, adding a bonus die for every successful Lore roll against his or her own Stamina, which represents the concentration necessary. The Containment isn't tested until a demon challenges it, and only then is the roll made. A given Containment must be defined as general (applying to any demon) or specific (applying to a certain individual or type).

When a combat situation ensues, the GM simply calls for actions from everyone involved. The order they are stated does not affect play in any way. If you want your action to pre-empt someone else's, just wait -- it'll turn out that way if you're lucky. The first job is simply to get all the intentions stated; the GM presents the intended actions of NPCs as well, insofar as PCs can perceive them.

All the combatants now roll Stamina. The GM should afford many, many situational bonus and penalty opportunities in combat as well as the standard ones. Good tactics and roleplaying can rack up bonus dice pretty quickly. In Sorcerer combat, it's not just a matter of the dice ruling the events. The roleplaying during the combat rules the dice! If you've been badly hit, your dice are in the negatives, and the guy's coming at you, do something smart and roleplay it well -- and you can triumph.

Example: Bobby, to say the least, is not a combat monster. However, he can use Regin to Hold opponents, and now he also has Wahoo to back him up. So the next time he's cornered (on a hotel balcony, as it happens), he unloads some demon-augmented butt-kicking. His player says, "I say, 'Stand still for your free anatomy lesson,' then I'll zap him with Hold." That's Regin's Power (5) against the jerk's Stamina (4), but Bobby gets a +1 for a cool quip for a total of 6.

Next round, the player says, "I grab his lapels and knee him in the nuts!" (Players get all fired up about this stuff.) Well, that's 2 dice for Bobby's Stamina, with +1 for tactics and +2 because the guy's just Held there: 5 dice total.

Once all the rolls are made, highest to lowest values indicate the order in which they happen. Don't touch the dice yet; now it's time for defensive rolls.

- If the target does not defend, he or she rolls base Stamina with no bonuses, only penalties if they apply. (Also, if the target is totally unaware of the attack, only one die is rolled.)
- He or she may decide to defend, or optionally, the player may have already committed to defense depending on the action

statement. A defending character rolls Stamina against the attack, subject to normal bonuses and penalties. If the character has acted already, the defense is free. However, if the character's own action hasn't occurred yet, choosing to defend means aborting that action and his or her initial combat roll is cancelled.

Example: The fight is on and everyone rolls! Briefly, Bobby gets a cool 4 victories on his victim. Unfortunately, the jerk's equally evil buddy (Stamina 4) has knifed Bobby, who opts not to abort his action and thus defends with only 2 dice. Jerk #2 beats Bobby's high die of 8 with 2 10's, for 2 victories.

Now for damage. Record the number of victories in each successful roll, and apply that number as X on the Damage Table. The number of victories (or more!) is usually taken as a penalty right off the character's Scores. Yes, all of the Scores, not just Stamina. Anything the character tries from that point on will be reduced by the damage (with one exception, explained below).

WEAPON TYPE	PENALTIES (X = victories)
Fists & feet	X for next action 2 lasting
Edged weapon	X for next action X victories lasting
Small handgun	X victories for next action X victories lasting
Nasty big handgun	2X for next action X + 1 lasting
Rifle	2X for next action X + 1 lasting
Big auto-rifle	3X for next action 2X + 1 lasting
Special damage (non-lethal)	X + demon's Power for next action X lasting
Special damage (lethal)	2X for next action X + demon's Power lasting

Here's what damage feels like, based on the penalties (round + lasting) experienced by the character at the moment. The exact locations on the table are meant only as examples.

Total penalties	Effects
\leq Stamina	nose bopped, ears ringing, shin banged, seeing stars
> Stamina	solar plexus hit, nerve center struck, joints twisted; pain incapacitates movement or action
> 2x Stamina	shocked/stunned into helplessness, no dignity

Example: Bobby just took a knife slash for 2 victories, which gives him a 4 dice penalty on his next action and a 2 dice penalty thereafter. Furthermore, this is greater than his Stamina (although not greater than twice his Stamina), so he is seriously pained and frightened.

Now for the good news. A PC can, at any time, make a Will roll *with no penalties* against the number of dice the character is trying to be able to use next round, up to his or her maximum score. This uses up no actions in the combat round either. This option is only available for sorcerer characters and reflects their incredible will to assert control over reality.

In situations of this sort, the player is reminded of the roleplaying guidelines in The System and Combat Rolls, above. If a player can come up with cool ways to express (1) channelling the pain and adrenalin into mastering himself and (2) phrasing (for example) a command to a demon in terms that particular demon will react to enthusiastically. This stuff is what theme music is all about.

Example: Bobby's next action is loaded with 4 penalties. He wants to jump off the balcony safely into the swimming pool below, but that penalty pretty much renders him useless unless he can master himself. He rolls his 6-dice Will vs. 2 dice (his maximum base Stamina). He gets it! Now he can use his 2-die Stamina without penalty - -and this roll CAN be boosted with roleplaying.

If you make it through combat, recovery is extensive. One-round penalties clear up during or just after the fight, but lasting penalties are never as bad as they look either. After the fight, if the character can rest and recover for a little while, their lasting penalties are halved (round up). Whatever is left

over will last for at least a week, if not months, in the form of bruises, stitches, and so on, as follows.

TOTAL LASTING PENALTIES	EFFECTSS
< Stamina	skin broken/scraped, bruises, need bandages, icepacks
> Stamina	in need of stitches, slings, temporary crutches
> 2x Stamina	bones protruding, massive hemorrhaging, guts hanging out

If the character's total lasting penalties, following combat, are over twice his or her Stamina score, he or she is dying, quickly or slowly depending on the circumstances. Note that these rules do not permit a PC to die during combat! A GM may rule that a PC dies during combat (e.g. soaking in a vat of acid, splattering after a 50-story fall), but the dice won't do it by themselves.

Example: After all the fightin's over, Bobby takes stock of his injuries. One (half) of the lasting penalties goes away, so he has only one left: the gash from a knife wound that needs to be bandaged and treated lightly. GM gives him a week to suffer under the penalty.

Demons time their actions and make their rolls just like other characters. Instructing a demon is a full action, so if your demon is faster than you are, it will probably be moving before you have a chance to tell it what to do. Or if it's irritated with you, maybe it won't be moving until you tell it. Either way can be an advantage or a problem.

Demons' abilities cause them fatigue. Each time a demon uses an ability, keep track. If the total number of abilities used in a single scene exceeds its Stamina, assign it penalties equal to the difference. Thus each successive use will incur another 1-die penalty. When the number of penalties exceeds the Stamina score, the demon will not be able to use any abilities at all until it has a chance to recover.

If a demon takes more than twice its Stamina of lasting damage, it dies nastily, then oozes, vaporizes, or explodes into nothingness, leaving no direct forensic evidence. Exactly what happens to a killed demon depends on whether it was Bound at the time. If it was unbound, it's Banished. It could be re-Summoned just like any other Banished demon. If it was Bound, though, it's

dead and will never be seen again. If its master really wanted to, he or she could call up a similar demon, but it wouldn't be the same individual.

Various combat modifiers and spot rules include the following:

- *Second-rate foes.* Certain combatants should be designated "one-hit" opponents, in that if a PC hits successfully, the target is put out of the fight. Whether they are stunned or maimed depends on the type of attack, but they certainly can be ignored for the rest of the combat. This is strongly recommended for large group combats with nameless minions.
- *Armor.* Protective clothing varies in detail depending on the type of attack. Kevlar converts Gun damage into Fist damage, but it is less effective against piercing melee weapons. The GM must judge what other sorts of armor are capable of. Note also that all attacks in Sorcerer are considered to be aimed, and no armor (aside from the demon ability) covers everywhere.
- *Melee weapons.* If they're blunt, just give the user a bonus die or two on the Fists damage table. If they're edged, then use the Blades/Claws table.
- *Guns.* The rules are bound to be disappointing to those players fascinated with the details of gun design. If in the GM's opinion a given gun has some special advantage, merely use an appropriate damage category. As a rule of thumb, if the detail in question has never made a plot-important difference in any commercial movie with which the GM is familiar, it should have no effect on play.
- *Automatic maximum.* The GM may award to any character an automatic maximum, meaning Total Victory, regardless of the actual victories rolled. This is for cases where the target is completely helpless or similar situations.
- *New columns.* Attacks like stun gas or poisons may require making up new kinds of damage effects, although many of these can be assigned a Power and treated like Special Damage. Also, most details in combat are best handled simply by giving bonus dice.
- *Switching damage categories.* IMPORTANT. The GM may also change which category of damage applies in certain situations. For example, a pistol at point-blank range may well use the category for a much heavier weapon. (This option eliminates PCs shrugging off bullets fired into their temples.)

Demon Interaction

If a demon fails to get its Need, it suffers. It will lose 1 Power per day until it is down to zero, in which case it must start making Will rolls to use any dice (much like a character reduced to 0 Stamina; see Combat). At that point it will lose 1 Stamina per day unless it rolls its Power successfully vs. its original Stamina. Once its Stamina hits 0, the unbound demon is automatically Banished.

This process also applies when a Possessor or Parasite cannot find and inhabit a host. Finally, it also applies when a demon is not bound to a master, doubly so if a demon cannot get its Need without a master's help.

If a Bound demon's master dies, the demon is still Bound. In many cases, that means its Need will eventually go unmet long enough to give it enough bonuses to rebel and become unbound, freeing it to seek a new master. A clever sorcerer may arrange for his pets to remain fed after he dies, thus carrying out his will as long as the arrangements last.

A demon may rebel at any time, matching its Will against its master's (modified for one side by the strength of the Binding), in order to disobey a command. A badly Bound demon might disobey all the time, or it might bide its time until the perfect moment. If its Need is met frequently, it might cut its binder some slack; conversely, a demon who is kept continually in Need will rebel and generally behave fractiously even if it is well Bound. It depends largely on how the binder treats the demon. If it is continually used as just a convenient tool or arbitrarily Punished, it will start resenting its binder. A little consideration, on the other hand, might go a long way with the right sort of demon.

The GM should keep track of where a disgruntled demon is on the following scale of dissatisfaction with its master.

- *Stage one: brat.* This is characterized by a brief, single instance of refusal, requiring direct commands (Will vs. Will) to make the demon obey. One common example is if the sorcerer orders the demon to do something in an obvious or public way.
- *Stage two: rebellious.* The demon is generally fractious and will be whiny, insulting, or prone to negotiations, depending on its personality, and it will require Will vs. Will rolls to do just about anything.
- *Stage three: vengeful.* This is bad. The demon applies itself seriously to its master's injury, humiliation, or demise. Remember, nothing induces a demon to tell the truth about its intentions or what it's up to on its own time; even direct commands may be met with stubborn silence.
- *The other stage three: true rebellion.* The demon attempts to break the Binding itself. This is very hard; the demon must repeat the Binding roll, with the strength of the Binding as a penalty (regardless of who had the advantage). Bonuses include the weeks it has been in Need and any other situational bonuses the GM assigns.

Every Sorcerer game must establish its own standards for just what kind of power balance should exist between sorcerer and demon. How the GM handles these interactions should be consistent with the atmosphere of the game itself. Some GMs are good at creating a feeling of drama and brooding menace, whereas others are able to coax incredibly funny moments out of roleplaying situations. Run with whatever works for you and your players.

Example: In his haste to vacate the hotel, Bobby has been neglecting Regin's Need, even though the demon probably saved his bacon during the fight. Worse, Bobby has, ah, interacted extensively with the woman he was tracking, who turns out to be a demon named Wahoo. Next time Bobby tries to use Regin, the GM merely smiles and has the demon do something heinously inappropriate. Bobby had better do some quick bargaining or excuse-making, or he's going to lose the services of his first demon.

Everyone should understand the rules on how to communicate with demons. There is no telepathy in Sorcerer. Passers, Possessors, and Inconspicuous sorts generally talk fine, unless otherwise defined; Parasites might, given their individual definitions. But they and Objects mostly communicate by conferring/using their abilities or by failing (refusing) to do so. These demon types are ostensibly low-stress, as they don't talk back, but that makes things difficult if they get fractious. Conceivably complex objects like a laptop computer might communicate, or a car's dashboard LEDs, but a cruel GM might make their messages relatively obscure.

Branches of sorcery and lots o'demons

There are two general branches of sorcery of interest, one very old and classical, the other quite recent and radical. Each is subdivided into a variety of approaches, only some of which are described below. The total number of sorcerers in the world is estimated at just over a hundred. The GM is encouraged to make up lots more demons, which do not have to correspond to any of the sects given below or to any others.

THE CLASSICISTS

Classical sorcerers belong to ages-old traditions; they are knowledgeable about specific texts and fluent in a horrible nonhuman language spoken by un-Bound demons. They extensively ritualize their Contacts and Summons, and their Binding methods usually include complex contracts.

The Way of the Black Wheel. These guys are your basic diabolists. They and their demons are interested in pure death: killing and control of killing, immortality, and revenge, revenge, revenge. Otherwise the demons get bored and rebel. This is a dangerous path: Humanity rolls are common, and complete loss of Humanity to a Black Wheel demon usually means it kills you and, depending on the GM's theological notions, eats your soul. Black Wheel Binding contracts are excessively convoluted.

Some Black Wheel demons

REGIN. This demon replaces its master's left eye; the eye has a golden iris. The host may use the following abilities, if Regin permits:

Command: applies to insects; roll sorcerer's Will vs. 3 dice to control a goodly swarm of whatever crawlies are available.

Perception: add Demon Power to dice rolled to perceive.

Hold (at Range): match Demon Power vs. the Will of a target to freeze them in their tracks (hit them again to restrict all movement and speech).

Regin has Stamina 2, Will 5, Lore 4, Power 5. It communicates with its host when he or she looks at spilled blood; words appear in the splatter as seen through that eye.

STRASE. This demon is a little imp who hides in its master's pockets. It has the following abilities, all of which are under its control:

Armor: any damage it takes from physical projectiles or weapons (up to the level of its Power) is applied to the Fists damage column, regardless of source.

Big: Strase may become very large, about 9 feet tall, and its Stamina is increased by its Power for purposes of resisting damage and endurance only (not for attack or defense rolls).

Daze: match Strase's Power vs. a target's Will; if successful, the target receives a penalty to perceptual tasks equal to the number of victories.

Special Damage: Strase uses the Special Damage column when figuring the effects of its attacks (it has really big fangs).

Vitality: Strase removes lasting damage equal to its Power following a fight, rather than the usual half.

Strase has Stamina 5, Will 6, Lore 5, Power 6.

Some Black Wheel demons cont.

SKAVOS. This Object demon is a ceremonial dagger
Mark: The target rolls Humanity vs. Skavos' Power; failure means anyone (or thing) with Lore of 1 or greater will thereafter perceive the individual as Marked, permanently. A sorcerer may remove a Mark by successfully rolling Lore vs. demon's Power.

Boost Lore: Skavos increases its master's Lore by its Power, although while it does so, its Power for other purposes is reduced to 1.

Perception: while holding Skavos, the master can perceive the cause of death of any corpse, or sense whether someone has died in a given room-sized area.

Skavos has Stamina 3, Will 4, Lore 3, Power 4.

The Black Wheel apprentice lives in a terrifying world of sacrifice, mysticism, and pain. Nothing is as important as your servitude: not family, not life, not dignity, and it is widely considered appropriate to feed an erring apprentice to demons. It is also considered appropriate for an apprentice to get fed up and assassinate his or her mentor, so the teacher walks a fine line between abusing the apprentice and making the abuse worth it.

Story seeds include:

- apprentices pitted against each other to win favor from their mentor
- apprentices pitted against the abusive master
- apprentice and master coping with an out-of-control demon

The Cult of the Dark Lady. This group is more directly religious; practitioners speak of a central, mystical personage called the Dark Lady, or the Queen of Witches, or Mother Night, and a hundred other titles. Her true name is unknown.

Dark Lady sorcerers operate out of covens; they may be the organizer and leader, or the tool of the non-sorcerous leader. Covens may be totally anonymous, and the belief system of a coven may not be sorcerous at all, such as a whorehouse or ordinary cult.

Contacting and Summoning the demons of the Dark Lady usually requires a wild orgy, with the coven's help. The demons are beautiful, passionate, vain, and very wilful. Their roles in the coven range from totally dominant to totally subservient, depending on the skill and personality of the

coven leader. Losing all of one's Humanity as a Dark Lady sorcerer usually means getting possessed, permanently.

Some Dark Lady demons

WAHOO. Wahoo is a Passing demon; she looks just like a human woman except for the scales up and down her spine.
Shapeshift: Wahoo may change shape into a gigantic winged eyeball (an alarming sight).

Travel: Wahoo teleports from place to place, although she won't do it if anyone with Lore 0 is watching. Her maximum range is 5 miles (equal to her Power).

Psychic force: Wahoo may induce cerebral spasms at a distance, using her Power on the Special Damage table, matching Will vs. target's Stamina to hit.

Cover: Wahoo has Cover: graduate student with dice equal to her Power.

Wahoo has Stamina 4, Will 5, Lore 4, Power 5

YAHOO. A possessor demon, requiring a host body in order to function. It favors tough, good-looking male hosts.

Hop: Yahoo can move to another host in his line of sight with a successful Will vs. Will roll. The host personality will not die, but must roll Will vs. Will to influence Yahoo's behavior, with a penalty equal to the victories in the initial possession roll.

Special Damage: uses the Special Damage column when figuring the effects of its attacks (attacks are scarily perfect martial arts moves).

Cover: matches to current host's Cover, at Yahoo's Power in dice.

Armor: any damage it takes from physical projectiles or weapons (up to the level of its Power) is applied to the Fists damage column, regardless of source.

Protection: Any damage from non-impact attacks (e.g. fire, gas, psychic attacks) up to Yahoo's Power is applied as if it were Fists damage.

Perception: (others' expectations)

Yahoo has Stamina 5, Will 6, Lore 5, Power 6.

Story seeds include the following:

- The coven is torn by a power-grab, with the character's leadership challenged or the leadership becoming available to him or her.
- The character has a serious relationship begin with a non-coven member, and his or her demons decide to participate in the relationship as well.

THE RADICALS

Radical sorcery is not backed by any body of education or shared practice through history, and its practitioners and details are highly individual. This sort of sorcerer regards the classicist as an old poop; the classicists think these guys are somewhere between stupid and insane.

The sanzoku. Technically, these practitioners are hardly sorcerers at all. They know about Binding, in a limited way, but little else. Their demons are always weapons. A strange martial subculture has grown up in the last few decades, of people engaging in savage one-on-one combat in kind of an ongoing tournament.

Sanzoku demons are not interested in unfair competition, and they will swiftly betray a master who uses anything but a melee weapon, or who wimps out from frequent armed encounters. Unfortunately, the demons are not articulate and simply base their loyalties on the wielder's actions.

Some sanzoku demons

SPIKE. fighting knife

Travel: Spike somehow always returns to its wielder's hand, although not in obvious ways (just happens to be kicked back to him or her during a fight, shows up in the master's locker after being stolen, etc).

Cloak: Spike is hard to perceive if it's not being used; add its Power to the opposition dice for relevant rolls. This applies to any perception, including metal detectors.

Spike has Stamina 2, Will 3, Lore 2, Power 3.

BZZT. chain-whip

Special Damage: use the Special Damage column in the damage tables when hitting with Bzzt.

Confuse: roll Bzzt's Power vs. the target's Will to force the target to lose his or her next action.

Bzzt has Stamina 2, Will 3, Lore 2, Power 3.

Some sanzoku demons cont.

BUMP. Claymore (Scottish sword)

Vitality: Bump's Power is added to its wielder's Stamina for purposes of recovering from damage after a fight (see Combat). In other words, they can be put down, but it's hard to keep them there.

Travel: the master may walk and run on air

Bump has Stamina 2, Will 3, Lore 2, Power 3.

Story seeds include the following:

- It's time for a tournament! Sanzoku travel from all over the world for a secret, last-man-standing showdown.
- Two sanzoku plan a duel, but it is interrupted by a Black Wheel demon who wants to eat them both. Slowly.

The psycho-junkies. The most radical sorcery involves ripping one's perceptions wide open, usually with the help of designer hallucinogens. The sorcerer uses self-created rites for Contacting and Summoning. Binding follows no set pattern. This brand of sorcery is highly improvisational, and the primary risk is going straight off the deep end, ending up muttering and picking at oneself in an asylum or alleyway.

The drug-warped sorcerer often commands his or her demons unconsciously. Furthermore, the demons themselves are insane. They respond equally unconsciously to the commands, for example with uncontrolled Travel, whether teleporting about or walking through walls, usually masked by a Cloak.

Some radical drug-demons

WOOT. This demon is a whiskey flask that never quite empties.

Boost Stamina: a swig will increase the master's Stamina by Woot's Power, up to twice the master's own Stamina. Unfortunately Woot's Power for all its other abilities drops to 1 while the Boost is sustained.

Hint: Woot rolls its Power vs. its master's Will of the target, and then the master rolls Humanity vs. the victories of the first roll. Success on both rolls means the target's player may ask one Yes-No question of the GM and be answered truthfully.

Taint: The target makes a Humanity check vs. Woot's Power; failure means loss of a Humanity point. The special effect includes physical as well as psychic malformation, with the details being left to the individual play group. Unlike real Humanity Loss, though, the Humanity will return in a few days.

Woot has Stamina 3, Will 4, Lore 3, Power 4.

RANTH. This demon only appears in mirrors, and only when its master looks into them. It can then speak to him or her.

Travel: Ranth's master may step into the image presented by a mirror, disappearing from three-dimensional reality.

Warp: Ranth's master may alter the shape of unliving material, up to its Power in kilograms squared. It will not animate material but simply give it a new shape. The effect lasts for one hour per point of Power.

Perception: Ranth's master may see what is happening from the perspective of any mirror within a 5-mile range.

Shapeshift: Ranth's master may shapeshift into the image of another individual with a Will vs. Will roll, only when the target is looking into a mirror occupied by the sorcerer (see above). The change lasts up to 5 hours.

Ranth has Stamina 4, Will 5, Lore 4, Power 5.

Some radical drug-demons cont.

ROGG. This demon becomes its master's shadow, which therefore appears a bit darker than it ought to. It can whisper in its master's ear, but is otherwise silent.

Spawn: Rogg produces small versions of itself, each at Power 1 with the ability Link (see below). Its own Power is reduced by 1 for each Spawn produced. Spawn may be resorbed and the Power regained.

Shadow: Rogg controls illumination in any enclosed space, affecting perception rolls by dice equal to its Power.

Link: Rogg and its master may see through one another's eyes at any time.

Rogg has Stamina 3, Will 4, Lore 3, Power 4.

Story seeds include the following:

- A trilogy of strange movies (actually demons!) is driving the population of a small town nuts, by Boosting their Lore scores (which start at zero for normal people) and providing Contact rituals.
- A rather nice and friendly (but very powerful, Power 9 or higher) demon is bound to a maddened, homicidal master. At first glance, the situation appears to be the other way around.